THE CONFERENCE

A Tragic Fantasy in One Act

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THE CONFERENCE

Characters:

A PORTER

FIVE REPORTERS
FIVE PHOTOGRAPHERS
A NOVICE REPORTER
THE TREATY MAKERS:
THE GENERAL
THE FOREIGN SECRETARY
THE BISHOP
THE FINANCIER
THE WORKER
THE INTELLECTUAL
TWO PAGES

Scene: A conference room in a neutral Eurppean country.

Time: After the war.

The scene is very plain: the walls are dark drapes with but one massive double-door in the back center. Upstage in the center, on a raised platform, is a long table with six tall-backed chairs arranged above it. Downstage right is a group of five chairs, a space, and almost at the proscenium, a stool. Down left are five chairs arranged in a straight line.

At rise the stage is empty. Presently the PORTER enters hurriedly down right, starts to cross directly left. As an after-thought he suddenly runs to the platform, takes a huge dust cloth and gives each of the six chairs above the table two brushes, the table one long sweep, then looks critically at the chairs down left and right, arranges the stool a trifle, and runs off left. There is a pause; then the PORTER re-enters, almost dancing as before, and bows low as the five REPORTERS and the five PHOTOGRAPHERS file in. The REPORTERS are all dressed alike, have the same mask-like expressions, carry notepads, and pencils behind their ears. They march stiffly in and stand in a row down left. The PHOTOGRAPHERS are dressed and made up alike as the REPORTERS, but carry flash bulb cameras instead of notepads. They march across the stage and stand in a row down right.

PORTER

(Bowing) Welcome, gentlemen of the press, welcome! Welcome, photographers of the press, welcome!

FIRST REPORTER

Not at all...

SECOND REPORTER

Don't mention it...

THIRD REPORTER

It's okay by us...

FOURTH REPORTER

Perfectly jake...

FIFTH REPORTER

In fact, we thank you. (All these speeches are said in quick succession. The PHOTOGRAPHERS bow, snap a picture of the PORTER. The PORTER is pleased, giggles.)

PORTER

You may inspect the conference room, gentlemen. (To the PHOTOGRAPHERS) You may photograph the ancient seats of the treaty-makers, gentlemen. (The REPORTERS bow, then file about the table, each running his fingers along the backs of the chairs for dust, then crawl underneath the table and inspect its underside. The PHOTOGRAPHERS take pictures of the table, the line of chairs, and each chair individually.)

REPORTERS

(In unison) Feels okay...

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(In unison) Looks okay...

REPORTERS

Smells okay...

PHOTOGRAPHERS

We give it our approval.

bREPORTERS

(Writing in their pads) "The treaty was signed in magnificent surroundings - regal, yet democratic, decorative, yet plain."

PORTER

(Anxiously) Are you ready, gentlemen?

REPORTERS

(Putting away their pads and pencils) We are ready.

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(Adjusting their cameras about their necks) We are ready.

PORTER

Then I shall inform the illustrious treaty-makers that the press is ready. (He bows politely to both groups, now standing stiffly at right and left, then runs out left. As he nears the exit, the NOVICE enters cautiously as if looking for something, and the PORTER almost runs into him. The PORTER retreats, bows politely and runs out. The bewildered NOVICE looks after him.)

NOVICE

Was that the...?

REPORTERS

(Interrupting) The porter.

NOVICE

And this is...?

REPORTERS

The conference room.

NOVICE

Ah, I knew it. (He advances more confidently into the room. He is a small man, dressed conservatively, hat, notepad, and pencil in hand.) (PROUDLY) They told me I'd find it two halls down the main corridor, third door on the right. (Proudly) And I guess I did! (He notices the REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS gazing coldly at him.) Say, are you the reporters? They said I'd...

REPORTERS

(Distantly) We are the gentlemen of the press.

NOVICE

Pleased to meetcha. (He holds out his hand. They ignore it and he is hurt. He tries gallantly, however, to show that he isn't.) I'm a reporter too...er, I mean, a gentleman of the press. (The REPORTERS gaze at him in shocked surprise.)

FIRST REPORTER

You...?

SECOND REPORTER

A reporter/..?

THIRD REPORTER

He's pullin' our leg!

FOURTH REPORTER

A killer!

FIFTH REPORTER

It's a scream! (The REPORTERS break out into scornful laughter. The NOVICE is a bit taken aback.)

NOVICE

(Sheepishly) Well, almost. I'm a novice. Just started. They said if I turned in a good story on this treaty I'd get the job. (Enthusiastically) And I will!

REPORTERS

(In disgust) A reporter! (They laugh derisively.)

FIRST REPORTER

He wouldn't know what to report! (He laughs.)

SECOND REPORTER

He wouldn't know how to write it! (He laughs)

THIRD REPORTER

He can't even write! (He laughs)

FOURTH REPORTER

He's ellitereyte! (He laughs)

FIFTH REPORTER

A reporter! (He laughs)

NOVICE

(Advancing toward them cautiously) But if you'd just give me a few hints...what the main points are...what questions to ask,...I'd be much obliged to you. It'd help me a lot. I need the job.

FIRST REPORTER

Not on your life!

SECOND REPORTER

Think we want a twirp like you queering it for us?

THIRD REPORTER

(As the NOVICE still advances pleadingly) Keep away from us!

FOURTH REPORTER

We don't wanna be seen with ya!

FIFTH REPORTER

Sit over there! (He points to the stool down right.)

NOVICE

But I've got a press card...I oughta sit with the rest of the reporters.

REPORTERS

Sit over there!

NOVICE

But what'll I tell...

REPORTERS

(Pointing) Get over there! (The NOVICE is crestfallen, turns and sadly crosses to the stool. As he nears it, he turns for another appeal to the REPORTERS. They cut him before he can speak.) Siddown! (The NOVICE sits as if pushed down. The REPORTERS brush their hands, adjust their coats, fix their ties, all in unisoh, and start to sit. The PHOTOGRAPHERS do likewise. Just as they are half seated the PORTER throws open the double doors at the back, dances in and around the table.)

PORTER

(Announcing proudly) Gentlemen of the press, photographers of the press, the Treaty-Makers! (He bows low toward the center door. The PHOTOGRAPHERS adjust their camera, the REPORTERS turn toward the door, all jumping up as one. Two PAGES, carrying hugh medieval trumpets enter, stand on either side of the doorway and blow a loud fanfare. The PORTER looks up, quickly announces again) The Treaty-Makers! (He bows again. The PAGES sound their fanfare. The porter looks up expectantly; as he sees they still don't enter he announces again.) The Treaty-Ma...(He is interrupted by the entrance of the TREATY-MAKERS. They file in stiffly: the GENERAL in a heavily decorated uniform of bright cloth and spangles, marches to the chair to the extreme right of the table and stands at attention; the FOREIGN SECRETARY, in full dress, red, white, and blue sash across his chest already loaded with decorations, marches to the chair on the extreme left of the table; the BISHOP, in his richest robes, marches piously to the chair next to the GENERAL; the WORKER, in rough dungarees and slouch cap, marches next the FOREIGN SECRETARY; the FINANCIER, in morning coat and trousers, top hat and monocle, marches next the BISHOP; the INTELLECTUAL, in tweeds and horn-rimmed glases assumes the last place. All are caricatures, move stiffly and abruptly and carry huge portfolios which they lay on the table in front of them. The PORTER is center, turns to the REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS.) Gentlemen of the press, photographers of the press, the Treaty-Makers! (The PHOTOGRAPHERS as one snap a flash picture. The TREATY-MAKERS wince and recover.)

The General

PORTER

The General! (The GENERAL assumes a stiff military posture, saluting. The PHOTOGRAPHERS snap his picture, the REPORTERS write feverishly. As soon as the picture is taken the GENERAL sags abruptly.) The Foreigh Secretary! (The FOREIGN SECRETARY bows, assumes a pose. The PAGES sound their fanfare, as they have done for the GENERAL and do for each of the TREATY-MAKERS. The PHOTOGROPHERS flash, the REPORTERS again write hurriedly. The pose is always dropped after each picture is taken.) The Bishop! (Same business) The Worker!(Same) The Financier!(Same) The Intellectual! (Same) Honorable Treaty-Makers, the gentlemen and photographers of the press. (The TREATY-MAKERS bow to the PHOTOGRAPHERS and REPORTERS. The REPORTERS pose for the PHOTOGRAPHERS who snap their picture. The PHOTOGRAPHERS pose for the REPORTERS who write enormous phrases in their pads. The PAGES start their fanfare, but the PORTER runs up to them and stops this desecration. He turns to all and bows.) Gentlemen, I leave you. (He bows himself out, closing the doors. The PAGES sound their fanfare. The PORTER runs back in, grabs the two PAGES, bows to the assemblage and runs out, pushing the still fanfaring PAGES before him, and closing the doors. During all this ceremony the NOVICE has been completely lost, has tried to write but is just started at each new introduction and he hashad to turn the page unfinished in time to catch up with the next. He has flinched at each fanfare and each flash of the cameras; he has posed for the PHOTOGRAPHERS who have ignored him; he has bowed every time the PORTER has, recovering abruptly realising his faux pas. Now he turns to sit down. The REPORTERS turn viciously on him.)

REPORTERS

(Hissing) Novice! (TheNOVICE remembers himself, jumps up; the REPORTERS smile broadly to the TREATY-MAKERS. The TREATY-MAKERS sit. The REPORTERS nod to the NOVICE and sit. The NOVICE starts to sit undertainly, but the PHOTOGRAPHERS snap a picture of the seated TREATY-MAKERS, and the flash startles him into rising. He tries to cover up with a polite laugh, shrugs his shoulders to the TREATY-MAKERS, and sits. The TREATY-MAKERS look at him coldly, turn to the REPORTERS questionly, as if to say,"How did he get in?" The REPORTERS lean confidentially toward the TREATY-MAKERS and whisper.) A novice. (The TREATY-MAKERS nod in understanding and settle back. The REPORTERS turn to glare at the the NOVICE, who shrugs apologetically, then turn to the TREATY-MAKERS expectantly.)

TREATY-MAKERS

Gentlemen of the press, we welcomeyou to this historic meeting.

REPORTERS

We are honored.

GENERAL

You know why you were sent for...?

BISHOP

Singled out from the multitudes of earthly men...?

FINANCIER

Chosen from among the great newspapers of the world...?

REPORTERS

We do.

INTELLECTUAL

To put your extraordinarily brilliant minds to work!

WORKER

To give the true wonderful picture to the world!

FOREIGN SECRETARY

To report this history-making meeting to posterity!

REPORTERS

Correct! We are honored to be able to witness...

PHOTOGRAPHERS

...And photograph...

REPORTERS

...The signing of the peace treaty...

PHOTOGRAPHERS

...That is to bring a brave new world.

NOVICE

(Happily) Really? A new world?

GENERAL

(Silencing him) A new world of might...

BISHOP

...And Godliness...

FINANCIER

A..And prosperity...

INTELLECTUAL

...And enlightenment...

WORKER

...And equality...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...And international good-will!

NOVICE

(Carried wway) Hurrah! (He jumps up in glee, suddenly remembers he is a reporter, seizes his pad and writes madly.)

FIRST REPORTER

(Writing) "We realize that this has been no ordinary peace conference..."

SECOND REPORTER

(Writing)"...That the nations of the world have spurned the outmoded delegations..."

THIRD REPORTER

(Writing) "...of purely national representatives with purely national interests..."

FOURTH REPORTER

(Writing) "...and instead have wisely decided to let the universal interests..."

FIFTH REPORTER

(Writing)"...of the armies, the church, the wealthy, the intellectuals, the workers, and the statesmen..."

REPORTERS

(In unison, writing)"...frame this epoch-making document."

NOVICE

(Writing) "And bring peace and freedom for ever and ever." (The TREATY-MAKERS and REPORTERS look at him in surprise.)

TREATY-MAKERS

Naturally.

REPORTERS

Of course. (They regard the NOVICE stonily.)

GENERAL

You must realize also that we have been working night and day...

BISHOP

...ever since the last day of the dreadful war...

FINANCIER

...for eleven months...

INTELLECTUAL

...and eleven days...

WORKER

...in the giant task...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...of framing this treaty.

REPORTERS

(Bowing in respect) This great treaty!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(Bowing) This monumental treaty!

TREATY-MAKERS

This greatest document ever created by Man!

BISHOP

And God.

GENERAL

(Coughing) Yes, of course.

REPORTERS

This Magna Charter of our brave new world!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

This new Bible of international security!

NOVICE

But what's it say?

REPORTERS

(Ignoring him) This heroic testament to mankind!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

This ode of strength and beauty!

REPORTERS

This...

NOVICE

But what does the treaty say?

REPORTERS

(Turning to the NOVICE in astonishment) What does it say?

NOVICE

Yes, what's in it?

TREATY-MAKERS

(To the NOVICE in surprise) What's in it? (They look in wonder to the REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS, then burst into laughter. The REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS join in.)

NOVICE

(Hardly able to make himself heard) But I must report what the treaty says. What does it say?

REPORTERS

(Derisively) He must report!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

He must report!

NOVICE

Yes, I must report what the treaty says. (All suddenly stop laughing.)

TREATY-MAKERS

(Look at each other in concern, then turn anxiously to the NOVICE) Must you report it?

NOVICE

Why, certainly.

GENERAL

But you just came here to...

BISHOP

...witness the final...

FINANCIER

...and history-making...

INTELLECTUAL

...signing of the treaty...

WORKER

...and certainly not...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...to report what it says.

REPORTERS

Certainly not. (They nod emphatically to the NOVICE)

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(Doing the same) Certainly not.

NOVICE

Why not?

TREATY-MAKERS

Why not?

NOVICE

Yes, why not? (The TREATY-MAKERS are baffled. They look at each other in concern and wonder)

GENERAL

(Rising) Why because...

BISHOP

(Rising) Because we...

FINANCIER

(Rising) Because it...

INTELLECTUAL

(Rising) Because you...

WORKER

(Rising) Because they...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

(Rising) Because... (They all look at each other in bewilderment)

REPORTERS

(Rising eagerly) Yes...?

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(Rising) Yes...?

NOVICE

(Rising insistantly) Yes, why not?

TREATY-MAKERS

(Seeming to see no reason why not.) Yes, (triumphantly) why not! (They busily undo their portfolios, extract huge documents and wave them aloft.) The Treaty!

REPORTERS

The Treaty!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

The Treaty!

NOVICE

At last, the treaty! (All sit down. The REPORTERS poise their pencils over their pads; the PHOTOGRAPHERS adjust their cameras for the historic shot; the NOVICE bites his pencil, leans forward eagerly. There is a pause. The TREATY-MAKERS adjust their treaties before them in unison, then look about. There is another pause. The TREATY-MAKERS clear their throats in unison. Then they look to the GENERAL to start; he modestly shakes his head, the REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS sighin in disappointment, the NOVICE recovering from a grand beginning on his pad. They turn to the FOREIGN SECRETARY; he declines in pantomime also, as do the FINANCIER, the INTELLECTUAL, and the WORKER in turn. Finally the BISHOP consents with a self-sacrificing air, and rises. The REPORTERS lean forward, the PHOTOGRAPHERS flash their bulbs, the NOVICE jumps, startled.)

BISHOP

In the new world peace shall reign for all...

GENERAL

And be kept by an international superarmy.

REPORTERS

(Writing) "Peace shall be universal."

NOVICE

(Writing) "We shall have an international superarmy." (The TREATY-MAKERS and REPORTERS look at him with annoynce, slight at first, but growing after each of his remarks.)

BISHOP

The Church shall reahh new heights of spiritual glory...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...subject, of course, to the gudding hand of the states.

REPORTERS

(Writing)"The Church shall reign free and supreme."

NOVICE

(Writing)"We shall continue to obstruct religious worship."

FOREIGN SECRETARY

(Rising as the BISHOP sits grandly) In the new era, the conquered countries will be restored their full rights...

INTELLECTUAL

...subject, naturally, to international supervision.

REPORTERS

(Writing) "The desecrated nations of the earth will be raised on high."

NOVICE

(Writing) "The subject nations will be held subject."

FOREIGN SECRETARY

The enemy shall be accorded an equal place in the new world...

GENERAL

...consistant with her despicable actions.

REPORTERS

(Writing) "Equality and love shall be extended to all, even the enemy."

NOVICE

(Writing)"Hate shall run rampant as before."

FINANCIER

(Rising as the FOREIGN SECRETARY sits) Prosperity and plenty shall the the inviolable rule...

INTELLECTUAL

...guided, naturally, by the latest crop and price control theories.

REPORTERS

(Writing)"Productionwill be unlimited and distibution equitable."

NOVICE

(Writing)"We shall burn crops as before."

WORKER

(Rising as the FINANCIER sits) In the new era, a world federation will establish the rules for the welfare of all peoples...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...tempered, of course, by the wishes of the participating nations.

REPORTERS

(Writing) "The world will be united in harmony."

NOVICE

(Writing) "The world shall be disunited as before."

WORKER

The laborers of the world will be strong and their own masters...

FINANCIER

...so far as the best interests of the bankers and manufacturers...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...and states, will allow.

INTELLECTUAL

(Rising as the WORKER sits) Education shall be extended to all, rich and poor...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...subject, of course, to the particular doctrines of each nation...

BISHOP

...and the Church...

FINANCIER

...and the wealthy.

REPORTERS

(Writing) "We shall have universal unrestricted education."

NOVICE

(Writing) "Our schools will be dictated to as before."

INTELLECTUAL

Literature and the arts will rise to new glories...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...under the protecting rules of the states.

REPORTERS

(Writing) "Man's creative efforts will flourish unhampered."

NOVICE

(Writing) "Censorship will despoil the arts as before."

INTELLECTUAL

The new world society will be simpler...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...more complex...

BISHOP

...more Godlike...

GENERAL

...more forceful...

WORKER

...MORE EQUItable...

FINANCIER

...more class-conscious.

REPORTERS

(Writing) "The new world society will be great and glorious."

NOVICE

(Writing) "The new world society will be small and mean."

TREATY-MAKERS

(Their growing annoyance with the NOVICE now breaking out openly, rising in a body and almost shouting,) The new world order will be regulated like the sun!

REPORTERS

(Also rising in annoyance, shouting at the NOVICE) The new world order will be regulated like the sun!

NOVICE

(Writing) "The new world order will be regulated."

TREATY-MAKERS

(Incensed) We will have a brave new world!

REPORTERS

We will have a brave new world!

NOVICE

(Writing) "We shall have a miserable status quo."

TREATY-MAKERS

(Stepping down from the platform angrily) The world we have made will be safe!

REPORTERS

(Rising and advancing on the NOVICE)The world they have made will be safe!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(Rising also and joining in the mounting crescendo) The world they have made will be safe!

NOVICE

(Writing unconcerned)"The world they have made will be unsafe."

TREATY-MAKERS

(Advancing threateningly on the NOVICE) The world will be strong!

REPORTERS

(Almost at the NOVICE) The world will be strong!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

The world will be strong!

Novice - (writing) The world will be strong!

TREATY-MAKERS

(Crowding just above the NOVICE, shouting down at him) The world will be new!

REPORTERS

(Crowding on the left of the TREATY-MAKERS, also shouting down at the NOVICE) Safe!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(To the right of the NOVICE) Strong!

TREATY-MAKERS

New!

REPORTERS

Safe!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Strong!

TREATY-MAKERS, REPORTERS, and PHOTOGRAPHERS

(A rhythmical fortissimo) New, safe, strong! New, safe, strong! New, safe, strong! (The PHOTOGRAPHERS march behind the TREATY-MAKERS down left, at the last word flash a picture of the group about the NOVICE. The NOVICE, until now unperturbed, absorbed in his writing, suddenly jumps.)

NOVICE

(Shouting) Stop! (The chant suddenly ceases. There is a pause. The NOVICE looks about at the group and asks quietly.) Will the world be free? (The TREATY-MAKERS are taken aback, the REPORTERS astonished. They look at each other, then at the NOVICE who repeats his question.) Will the world be free?

TREATY-MAKERS

Free?

REPORTERS

Free?

NOVICE

Yes, free.

TREATY-MAKERS

(To the REPORTERS, in amazement) He wants freedom!

REPORTERS

(To the PHOTOGRAPHERS in the same tone) He wants freedom!

NOVICE

(Before the PHOTOGRAPHERS have had more than a chance to open their mouths) Yes, I want freedom. (The TREATY-MAKERS throw up their hands in dismay, the REPORTERS their pads, horrified. They look at each other; then the TREATY-MAKERS begin to laugh, louder and louder, and they march back to their places behind their chairs. The REPORTERS laugh too, and march across to their places before their seats. The PHOTOGRAPHERS are roaring, can hardly snap their picture, first of the TREATY-MAKERS holding their sides, then the REPORTERS with heads thrown back; finally as they march across the stage, they turn suddenly and flash a picture of the NOVICE, more bewildered than ever. He jumps in alarm, and everyone laughs the harder.)

TREATY-MAKERS

He wants ideals!

REPORTERS

He wants freedom!

TREATY-MAKERS

He wants Utopia!

REPORTERS

He wants freedom!

TREATY-MAKERS

He wants everything!

REPORTERS

He wants freedom! (Their laughter reaches a peak, and for a moment is inaudible)

NOVICE

But we fought the war for freedom! (The laughter suddenly stops. The TREATY-MAKERS and REPORTERS glare at him. He is cowed.) At... at least I did.

TREATY-MAKERS

You know nothing. Your were just a cog. You did hothing.

NOVICE

But I know I fought...and it was dirty...and cruel...and I was afraid...but I fought.

TREATY-MAKERS

You fought!

REPORTERS

You fought!

NOVICE

Yes - for freedom.

TREATY-MAKERS

For freedom - ha!

REPORTERS

For freedom - ha!

GENERAL

You fought for right...

BISHOP

...and God...

FINANCIER

...and the earth's wealth...

INTELLECTUAL

...and internationalism...

WORKER

...and equality...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...and patriotism...

TREATY-MAKERS

...and not for some new-fangled impractical idea!

REPORTERS

No, not for some new-fangled idea.

NOVICE

But you said you were building a new world, a brave new world, didn't you?

TREATY-MAKERS

(Almost spitting it out) Yes, but not as new as that!

REPORTERS

Not as new as that!

NOVICE

(Appealing) But it's not really new...it's the oldest thing there is.

TREATY-MAKERS

We are not interested in old-fashioned ideas!

REPORTERS

No old-fashioned ideas!

NOVICE

But freedom's neither new nor old - it's timeless!

TREATY-MAKERS

The new world will have no room for timeless ideas!

REPORTERS

No timeless ideas!

TREATY-MAKERS

The new world will fit the new times!

REPORTERS

The new world will fit the new times!

NOVICE

(Growing more and more desperate and dismayed, to the INTELLECTUAL) But won't you have freedom of speech?

INTELLECTUAL

All will be free to speak...

FOREIGN SECRETARY

...within the necessary patriotic limitations.

NOVICE

(Appealing to the BISHOP) Won't you have freedom of religion?

BISHOP

All will be free to worship...

INTELLECTUAL

..as far as the international doctrines and regulations will permit.

NOVICE

(To the WORKER) Won't you have freedom from fear?

WORKER

All will be free from fear...

GENERAL

...under the protecting sword of the superarmy.

NOVICE

(To the FOREIGN SECRETARY) Won't you have freedom from want?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

All will be free from want...

FINANCIER

...as far as the laws of class economics will allow.

NOVICE

(Desperately appealing to all) Then the new world won't be free?

TREATY-MAKERS

The world will be new, safe, strong!

REPORTERS

(Joining in a mounting crescendo, faster and faster) New, safe, strong!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

New, safe, strong!

NOVICE

(Hysterically) But it won't be free!

REPORTERS

(Rising) New, safe, strong!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(Rising) New, safe, strong!

NOVICE

(Writing friensedly in his pad)"But it woh't be free!

REPORTERS

(Advancing threateningly on the NOVICE) The world will be...

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(Advancing around the NOVICE) New!

REPORTERS

Safe!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Strong!

NOVICE

(Looking first in amazement, then in fear,from the REPORTERS to the PHOTOGRAPHERS retreats to the center of the stage, faces the TREATY-MAKERS, still standing stonily, and stretches his arms out in supplication to them.) But the world won't be free!

REPORTERS

The world will be...

PHOTOGRAPHERS

New! (The REPORTERS tear his notepad from the NOVICE, pass it to each other and each tears out more pages letting them fall to the floor.)

REPORTERS

Safe!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Strong! (They grab the bewildered NOVICE and throw him to the REPORTERS.)

REPORTERS

(Throwing him roughly to the PHOTOGRAPHERS) New!

PHOTOGRAPHERS

(Throwing him back) Safe!

REPORTERS

(Throwing him to the floor) Strong! (There is a sudden silence. The REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS march dispassionately around the unconscious body of the NOVICE and back to their former positions at either side of the stage. They look expectantly to the TREATY-MAKERS.)

TREATY-MAKERS

(Quite calmly) We shall now sign the treaty. (They flourish their treaties aloft, then place them on the table and each "signs," though their hands and pens do not move on the paper. The REPORTERS write frantically. The PHOTOGRAPHERS snap a picture. The TREATY-MAKERS step to the next chair on their left, the FOREIGN SECRETARY moving behind to the GENERAL's place, and sign on the copy, again without more than placing their hands on the treaty. The PHOTOGRAPHERS flash and the REPORTERS write as the TREATY-MAKERS move in succession to each other's place.)

REPORTERS

(At the first pose, writing.) "Thus was signed...(At the next pose) the heroic treaty...(At the next) which brings to all mankind... (At the next) a golden age,..(At the next) a brave new world... (At the next) of strength and security. (The PAGES throw open the center doors, assume posts on either side and blow their fanfares. The TREATY-MAKERS bow to the REPORTERS, who bow in return, to the PHOTOGRAPHERS, who bow in return, then about face. The PHOTOGRAPHERS flash a picture of them. The TREATY-MAKERS whirl around, strike poses. The PHOTOGRAPHERS take their picture again. The TREATY-MAKERS bow, the REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS bow, and the TREATY-MAKERS march out. The PAGES, still blowing, are now exhausted, take all their strength to march out and pull the doors closed behind them. The REPORTERS make a final period on their pads, place their pencils behind their ears, put on their hats at a rakish angle, and march out stiffly down left. The PHOTOGRAPHERS adjust their cameras about their necks, cross left. Just as they are at the proscenium, they turn, take a last picture of the conference table, and file on out. There is a pause. Then the NOVICE slowly opens his eyes, sits up, feels to see if he is whole, sighs, then looks about for his notebook. Dismayed to see it scattered, he crawls about picking up the bits. The PORTER enters down right carrying his huge dust cloth. He starts at seeing the NOVICE. The NOVICE gives him a sad apologetic smile and continues to pick up his papers. The PORTER shrugs, crosses up to the table, and starts to dust it and the chairs behind with great care. The NOVICE has crawled to his stool for the last

piece of his pad, now picks himself up and add starts to dust his clothes. He notices the PORTER so industriously polishing the table, slowly stops his own dusting, and regards him in wonder.)

NOVICE

Whatcha doin?

PORTER

Polishing the table.

NOVICE

Why?

PORTER

Have to.

NOVICE

I mean why so hard?

PORTER

Gotta keep it clean.

NOVICE

What for?

PORTER

So it'll be ready.

NOVICE

When?

PORTER

Next time.

NOVICE

Next time?

PORTER

(Stops, looks curiously at this ignorant novice) The next peace conference.

NOVICE

(Bewildered) The next...?

PORTER

(A bit impatiently) After the Third World War. (He goes on with his dusting.)

NOVICE

Oh. (He stands lost in thought a moment, then notices his pencil on the floor and picks it up.) Oh. (He gathers his hat, papers, and pencil in his hand, and slowly crosses left as if finally realizing the utter futility of his ever expecting anything else. As he hears the left proscenium, he stops, turns, looks at the PORTER, murmurs almost inaudible.) Oh. (He pauses a moment, then his face assumes the mask-like expressionless form of the REPORTERS, he puts his hat on his head at a rakish angle, pushes his pencil behind his ear, and marches out stiffly, automatically. The PORTER gazes after him a moment, shakes his head at the stupidity of some people, and continues dusting.)

CURTAIN